

# Strings That Tie To You

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## Strings That Tie To You by EliDeetz

**Category:** Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004), IT (Movies - Muschietti)

**Genre:** Alternate Universe, Alternate Universe - Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind Fusion, Angst, Dont know if it will have a happy ending yet so good luck, M/M, This is an eternal sunshine au what do you expect

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Eddie Kaspbrak, Mike Hanlon, Richie Tozier, Stanley Uris, others - Character

**Relationships:** Ben Hanscom/Beverly Marsh, Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier

**Status:** In-Progress

**Published:** 2019-11-26

**Updated:** 2019-11-26

**Packaged:** 2019-12-19 15:51:40

**Rating:** Mature

**Warnings:** Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

**Chapters:** 6

**Words:** 6,679

**Publisher:** archiveofourown.org

**Summary:**

Eternal Sunshine of The Spotless Mind Reddie AU

Inspired by art made by @eddieenchanted on Twitter!

# 1. Chapter 1

The buzzing sound of the moving train isn't too loud, but just enough to keep Richie's mind quiet.

It'd been a weird morning.

When he woke up, something weird nagged at his chest, and the back of his mind. He had a headache, and his eyes burned, as if he'd been crying in his sleep. There was a strangely familiar pain in his chest, Richie felt as though he would have a heart attack. He felt empty, like something was missing.

Something didn't feel quite right.

Sure, he'd felt sad before, but not like this. *Never* like this. Richie feels *miserable, lonely, incomplete*.

He had tried to shrug it off, as he had done many times before. Pouring a good shot of whiskey in his coffee usually did the job. Having a smoke or two on his way to the sub always helped. But halfway through his coffee he began to gag, and when he was patting his pockets as he walked away from his apartment he couldn't find a single cigarette.

Nothing was coming out right, and he wasn't having it.

Which was why, when it was time for him to take the subway to go to work, he turned on his heels and ran as fast as he could.

He really didn't know what was the plan when he started running, nor which was his destination. But then he caught a glimpse of the train station as he turned on 42nd St, and the next thing he knew he was buying the first ticket to Derry, Maine.

So, now there he sat. Close to the window in a nearly empty train car, trying to focus on anything but the hole in his chest.

After an hour or so on the road, he began to question his rash decision. It definitely isn't the first one he's taken, but he's now wondering if spending 6 hours by himself *with his thoughts* has been a

good idea.

Richie curses under his breath, and hits his head against the window repeatedly, in an attempt to quiet the voices once again. When that doesn't work, he shoves his hands into his pockets, immediately finding his little black notepad.

He begins to scribble, losing himself on his writing for a good 45 minutes.

The words seem to flow easier when he's upset. Sure, they are nothing but self deprecating jokes and miserable characters that he comes up with, but it's better than nothing. At least definitely better than staring at a blank page an hour before his radio show.

*'Last week I skipped work and took a train. Which may sound like a new Hozier song, but it's a thing that I did.'*

His hand stops writing for a moment, trying to figure out where the hell he's going with that opening sentence.

*'I went to Derry, Maine. Which is a place that exists. The place that I was born.'*

He pauses again, wondering how he'd gotten that fucking job on the first place. Rubbing his face in an exasperated manner, Richie scratches everything off. Yet somehow, the word Derry remains intact.

Why is he going to Derry? He has no idea.

Truth be told Richie hasn't even thought about that hell hole in nearly 3 *decades* . And while it was true he'd met the best people in his life there, there really isn't anything else worthy enough to go back.

His parents aren't there, nor any other relative. Plus his friends had left pretty much at the same time he did.

Bev and Ben are in New York, most of the time. Every now and then they go to Ben's summer, winter or *whatever-season* houses. Stan and Patty have settled in Georgia, the love birds. It fits them, the white

picket fence type of lifestyle suited them quite well from the very beginning. As for Bill and Mike, they are both in opposite sides of the map. Bill in L.A. with his wife Audra, and Mike in Florida, managing the family business from afar. And...

And.

That's all of them... right?

"I should really stop drinking before noon." He mutters under his breath, counting the heads of his friends over and over.

Suddenly, he hears the door of the car open and close, catching his attention almost immediately. Richie feels his stomach drop to his ass, finding himself unable to stop staring at the man who just entered the wagon.

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*What means this tumult in a vestal's veins?*

*Why rove my thoughts beyond this last retreat?*

*Why feels my heart its long-forgotten heat?*

## 2. Chapter 2

“He just fucking... he *saw* me, Ben. He saw me but didn't even *look* at me.”

Richie was pacing across the living room, doing his best to focus on breathing. He was struggling to do so, not really knowing if it was because of him not being able to sit still, the many years of smoking behind him, or the *mild* anxiety he was suffering because of what happened that day.

“He didn't blink, he didn't smile or made that stupid fucking face he does when he's annoyed. He just... he *kept walking*. He ignored me, Ben. Like I was *no one*.”

Ben sat at the end of the largest couch in the room, nearly curled into a ball while covering his mouth with one hand. His expression was unreadable, managing to disturb Richie more than he already was.

“And yes, I know - *I know* our breakup wasn't the best and we hadn't spoken since that day. But really? Acting like he doesn't even know me. That's fucking childish, not even *I* would do something like that.”

More silence, Richie clenched his jaw, taking a sharp breath in and out before continuing.

“I shouldn't have gone there. It was a mistake, I fucked things up, I always do, I-”

“Okay! That's enough!” Beverly's voice cut him, coming from the kitchen with a large glass of wine that *definitely* wasn't on her hand a minute ago. Richie paled, and he felt like he would throw up right then and there.

He'd done it. He'd pushed the love of his life away, so far he pretended like he didn't know him, and now he was doing the same with his best friends. Richie stood still in the middle of the room, both arms too numb to even try and hug himself.

He remained quiet, silently waiting for Bev to open the front door for

him to leave.

“ *Bev* -” Ben tried to calm her down, but got immediately cut off by her.

“I've had it, it can't go on like this.”

“Bev, I'm sorry. I - I'll... I'll go.” Richie stuttered as he tried not to start weeping, causing Bev's face to immediately soften.

“No, Richie. No, it's not like that. It's not you, honey.” She approached him, putting the glass of wine away and holding him in an attempt to soothe him. “This is... He-”

“Bev, it's not our place.” Ben tried to argue, but it sounded like he was trying to convince himself more so than her.

“What? What are you guys talking about?” He was rubbing his eyes harshly, getting rid of the tears that blurred his sight.

“I don't wanna hear it, they're both our friends.” Beverly set her foot down with her tone, and both men knew. “Richie, there's something you gotta know.”

When she stepped away from him, he nearly heaved, but somehow managed to keep it down, and remained quiet as she disappeared back into the kitchen. Ben stayed on his seat, closing his eyes as he focused on his own respirations, and resting his head on his clenched fists.

“You might want to sit down, Rich,” Ben said, as Bev came back with an envelope in hand.

“I'm fine here, Haystack.”

She pulled a small postcard from it and handed it to him, her jaw tight and eyes void of emotion, at least not any that Richie could process at that moment.

“*Dear Mr. & Mrs. Hanscom*” he muttered under his breath, the knot in his throat growing bigger as his eyes scanned the piece of paper. “ - *has had.... Tozier... **erased** ? Never mention... Lacuna inc.*”

By the time he was done, he was sitting on the couch next to Ben, hands shaking and forehead glistening with cold sweat. His eyes focused on the message, then on Bev's blue eyes, then on Ben's... then back on the message, “*erased*” . Back on Bev's, now Ben, was he crying? God, everything was so fucking blurry all of a sudden. He felt hot. No, cold. He was shaking. His stomach ached, his esophagus was burning. *Great*, he was puking all over their seemingly new carpet.

He subconsciously expected Beverly to yell, or Ben to run away disgusted. But neither of those things happened. Instead, he found her pulling back his hair away from his face as he puked, rubbing his back with her other hand on a soothing manner, and Ben running to get water and a wet towel to clean his face.

“Honey, I’m so sorry...” Bev whispered close to his ear, her trembling voice bringing him back to his senses.

“We tried to convince him it was stupid, but -” Ben tried to explain, justify his actions, but he simply couldn’t find the words. “We should’ve tried harder, we should’ve told you before.” He mumbled, berating himself when seeing their friend’s current state. “We’re sorry, Rich.”

Richie sat still on the couch, letting his friends embrace him and allowing the tears that he’d been fighting back to fall freely, immediately wetting his cheeks and neck. For once, he was speechless, his mind was blank and the only emotion he could feel was pain.

The trio remained in silence, only the sound of their sobs cutting through it. He didn’t realize when Ben and Bev had started crying too. His sight was unfocused, lost somewhere on the photographs on top of the fireplace in the room. It was then that he noticed, the only photo of them, which Bev took when they moved in together, was gone.

He closed his eyes, trying to soothe the burning sensation from crying so much. When he opened them, he found the postcard on the floor close to the ruined carpet. Richie read the words over and over, unable to fully grasp the fact that it was real, that it was done. So he read it once again:

*'Dear Mr. & Mrs. Hanscom*

***Edward Kaspbrak** has had **Richard Tozier**  
erased from his memory. Please never  
mention their relationship to him again.*

*Thank you.*

*Lacuna Inc.'*

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*Dear fatal name! rest ever unreveal'd,*

*Nor pass these lips in holy silence seal'd.*

### 3. Chapter 3

Derry hasn't changed. Richie is able to tell since the moment he steps out from the train.

As he walks among the calm streets and admires every building and three, he remembers it looks the same as it did before he left. When he hears the people talk and pretend not to stare at him, he knows only his friends and him have been the only people to leave. And when he arrives to The Barrens, and takes a deep breath in, the smell of salty water and moss from the Kenduskeag Stream warm up his chest as his mind floods with memories of his childhood, and his friends.

"The clubhouse," Richie finds himself smiling as he remembers the comfortable, albeit dangerous, underground lair Ben built for all of them with his bare hands, which the Losers turned into a home, together.

His phone buzzes, it's his boss. Right, he missed work. He's not really in the mood to come up with an excuse right now.

He turns towards the woods, away from the running water, and wonders if the cave is still there. But then, a voice at the back of his head begins to list the dangers of ending up stranded in the woods looking for a hole in the ground. Except it isn't his voice, and truth be told, he doesn't quite recognize it.

*But what if it's still up?* He argues, wondering if the intrusive voice is simply a spur of the moment thing, or if he's actually becoming a more rational person than yesterday.

*If it is up, the structure is old, you're not 13 anymore. What makes you think it'll hold your weight, dickwad? You wanna end up with a broken leg or arm, unable to crawl out from it? Richie Tozer found dead in a hole on Derry, Maine. New Yorkers would go wild with that one.*

Richie grunts, and shakes his head in an attempt to quiet the strange voice. He has no idea where it came from, and he's currently too tired to try and figure it out.

Despite nostalgia begging him to just go and find the fucking clubhouse, he decides against it. Instead, he walks along the stream, kicking rocks and sighing repeatedly, like heartbroken teenager in a 90's romcom. He purses his lips at the thought, realizing how he tends to kick himself when he's down, making jokes instead of dealing with his emotions like a normal human being.

A part of him really thought (and hoped) being to Derry would soothe the strange burning sensation in his chest, or at least keep his mind off the loneliness that threatens to consume him at any moment. But it doesn't. He's still in pain... and alone.

The sound of splashing water brings him out of his pitiful trance, and he looks forward to find a figure at the other side of the stream, where it almost connects with the canal. He grimaces at the thought of it, wondering what kind of grown man would dare go near.

Richie realizes his feet aren't stopping, finding himself curious to get a better look at the adventurous man near the gray water, which basically means *piss and shit* .

*Have you ever heard of a staph infection?*

There's the fucking voice again, and Richie is so close to confirm is his common sense. That it finally got tired of him and has created a life inside his head to keep him from doing reckless shit. He gets distracted by it, making him stop, but he *is* somewhat closer to that other person, just enough to... recognize him?

It's the guy from the train, the one he held eye contact for so long he wondered if perhaps he was a fan of his work. Richie thought he wasn't, he didn't try to talk to him. But now he is here, at the Barrens, where not a lot of people go, that he knows of.

*Did he fucking follow me here?* He wonders, in his own voice.

Richie is about to turn around and walk away when the other man seems to feel his presence around. Their eyes meet, once again, and he can tell the moment he recognizes him back. Well, this is awkward. What if he in fact *didn't* follow him here, but now *he* thinks Richie followed *him* ?

He's overthinking, he knows it, but he can't stop it. Richie overthinks everything and has done it for as long as he can remember, which is why he talks, a lot. He thinks letting out whatever is going on in his head helps, and he also does things as they cross his mind. He's too afraid he will regret not doing something because he was too busy wondering if it's the better choice.

They're still staring at each other, he realizes once his head quiets for a second. *Fuck* . He backtracks, trying to come up with a smooth way to turn around and walk away... *and* pretend he wasn't walking towards him.

Perhaps maintaining eye contact for so long isn't the best way to do so.

Richie feels dumb, he hasn't felt this way in years. He thinks maybe the stupid town has a bad effect over him. Coming to Derry was a mistake.

He finally cuts off the visual contact, pretending to look for something in his pockets. When he looks back at the man, he's staring down at the water, fidgeting with what seems to be a rock in his hands.

*Rock war* , Richie's inner neanderthal voice says, the one that also edged him to get shitfaced at his first SNL party.

No.

Stranger voice, thanks for showing up.

Speaking of strangers, he looks back at Richie once more, *damn* those brown eyes. They're warm, almost familiar, not threatening at all. He's fucking attractive, *and sharp dressed*, he realizes. He feels a little less on edge, and somehow relaxes.

He feels in control of his body once again, and simply gives him a nod as a greeting, not really knowing why. The other man nods back, was that out of politeness or did he recognized him as well? He figures it doesn't hurt to try and find out, and begins to walk closer once again, it wouldn't hurt him to meet someone new. They ran to

each other twice now, and in *The Barrens* of all places.

But then his phone buzzes, *again* . 13 lost calls. Richie clenches his jaw, but then smiles at the man sheepishly, before turning and going back to town.

Time to go back to reality.

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*Though cold like you, unmov'd, and silent grown,*

*I have not yet forgot myself to stone.*

## 4. Chapter 4

He really didn't know how many days had passed since he found out. Richie couldn't sleep since that night at Ben and Bev's, everytime he closed his eyes, the words seemed to burn his eyelids, causing him to spend the entire night crying.

Richie was convinced he couldn't feel anything but despair.

His eyes watered once more, so he rubbed them harshly to avoid crying in the middle of the subway station on his way to work. He wasn't going to do it anymore, even less in front of tons of strangers.

Beverly had offered him to stay with them a couple of days, so they could go to Ben's house at the Hamptons. But he had to work, and he knew third-wheeling a recently married couple wouldn't do him any good. He just agreed to a weekend at Ben's house, so he wouldn't be alone.

He knew they meant well, he knew they wanted him to stop hurting over Eddie. He knew they'd tried to tell him from the beginning... Richie frowned, mouth falling open as he connected some dots in his head. When he finally did, he reached inside his bag trying to find his phone, and immediately dialed one of the 6 numbers he knew by heart.

The dial tone made his anxiety peak, he didn't know why he was doing it, but he needed to know.

*"Hey Rich."* Bill's cheerful voice came from the other side of the line, to which he would usually reply to making some voice, trying to throw him off.

But he wasn't in the mood for that.

"Did you know?" The question left his lips before he could think about them, nearly making him wince once he realized.

*"I'm good, thanks for asking! What about –"*

"Cut the fucking crap, B-B-Bill. Did you or did you not know what

Eddie did?" Richie raised his voice, immediately looking around to make sure no one was staring at him. But Bill didn't reply, allowing the silence to fill in as an answer. "I can't *fucking* believe you. Did all of you know and no one even thought of telling *me*? What's your fucking deal?"

He was heated, he hadn't felt that angry at Bill since the day he made them fight Henry Bowers when they were 13. But this was worse, so much worse. Richie could feel the veins on his forehead pulsing, and those fucking drops of sweat sliding down his neck.

*"We t-ried to stop him, Rich, we really d-did. We didn't even believe it was possible, we grew up t-together. But then the-the letters arrived. We didn't know much about the procedure, or how affects his brain. We -"*

Bill was rambling, Richie could hear the regret in his voice as his stutter came back, it broke his heart but he couldn't stop himself from talking.

"What I don't get -" he interrupted him once again, pinching the bridge of his nose to try and soothe the headache - "Is how someone like Eddie would even *consider* undergoing a procedure like that. He doesn't even steps into a pharmacy until he's researched all about it, and all of a sudden he's fucking... getting his brain washed? By some sketchy company nearly no one knows anything about? *How the fuck \_*"

*" That might've been my fault ."* Bill rushed to say, managing not to stutter once.

The silence that followed was deafening, and for a moment, Bill thought Richie would hang up. " *What?* " Richie's tone was lower than before, yet somehow more menacing.

He heard Bill take a deep breath, taking a second before continuing: *"I ... I knew about the o-organization, the procedure. Netflix hired me to write an episode based on it, you know being a horror writer they t-thought - "*

"Jesus FUCK, Billam. To the point," Richie pressed, his other hand clenched in a fist so tight he thought he would injure it somehow.

*"It came out in a ph-phone call, I was trying to get his mind off of the b-breakup. He showed t-too much interest in it... I- I just kept talking about it because of my script and the next thing I knew he was asking me for more d-details."* Richie remained quiet, pushing his friend to keep on talking. *"I'm... I'm sorry, Rich. This is my fault. You're right to be mad at me."*

Neither of them said a thing. It didn't feel like there was anything else left to say.

A couple of minutes passed, the silence consuming both of them in different ways. On one side, Richie felt like shit. His best friends knew about Eddie's intentions, and despite their best efforts, none of them could convince him not to do it. And, on the other, Bill felt guilty. He felt he should've keep his *stupid, stuttering* mouth quiet.

*"Rich?"*

"I gotta go, Bill." Was all Richie said before hanging up.

There was a knot in his throat that wasn't there before, and a dark feeling clouding his conscience. Richie stood up from the bench he was sitting at, and watched the train that was supposed to take him to work arrive.

He fidgeted with his phone inside his pocket, and took one sharp breath in before pulling it out and make another call.

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*Soon as thy letters trembling I uncloze,*

*That well-known name awakens all my woes.*

*Oh name for ever sad! for ever dear!*

*Still breath'd in sighs, still usher'd with a tear.*

## 5. Chapter 5

*‘ So, I visited my hometown, it's called Derry. When I lived there, the population was about 3086 people. And then Henry Bowers, the homophobic piece of shit that bullied me, and his mom moved in.*

*The number went up to 4087’*

Richie's hand halts, asking him to stop writing *right now*. It's trash, he knows it. He hasn't written his own material in a long time and this is why: it fucking sucks.

He rubs his face harshly out of frustration, fighting back the need to hit his head against the window like he did before. There are more people on the train back to NY, including a mom whose child keeps kicking the back of Richie's seat.

*This is why we never wanted children. We don't have the patience.*

“Thanks, Gollum.” He hisses at the foreign voice. If he's honest with himself, he's kind of getting used to it, as if it had always been there.

Despite having a kid realigning his vertebra, he's enjoying this trip better than the last one. The quiet conversations of the people around him serve as white noise, allowing him to focus on it instead of the mess in his head.

The wagon's door opens, and every passenger that's awake turns their attention towards it.

It's him again. The guy from last time, the one he ran into at the Barrens. Richie feels his neck and ears heat up, praying that it's just a heat wave instead of him blushing. It gets even worse when the stranger's brown eyes find his, and gives him a slight nod as he walks into the car.

He sits a couple of spots away from Richie, facing him, but immediately focuses his attention on his phone.

Richie begins to fidget with his pen, bending it as much as he can without breaking it. He's staring at the guy, he feels like a creep. But

he likes him, he's attractive, and they just found each other for the third time.

"That's fucking sappy," he mutters under his breath.

The kid kicks his seat harder than before, so abruptly Richie drops his pen and notepad. He can't help but turn around and glare at the little demon. The mom glares back at him, and Richie instantly gets it's a battle that he shouldn't try to win.

Instead of saying anything else, he decides to move seats, and bends down to grab what the kid made him drop. The notepad is right next to his feet, but the pen is nowhere to be seen. Richie whines, feeling his back muscles stretch in a weird way as he sits back up.

"Where are you, you little bitch?"

He starts scanning the wagon's car, thinking he might need to take another trip to the ophthalmologist. When he's about to give up his search, however, he's somehow able to hear it roll away, and manages to follow the sound that stops as the object hits something.

*Of course .*

The handsome stranger is scrolling through his phone, not noticing Richie's pen right next to his foot. The comedian takes a deep breath in, considering just giving up the stupid pen. But something inside him sees it as something else. He has an excuse to actually talk to him this time, without looking like a weirdo at the other side of a stream.

Richie stands up from his seat, ignoring the way his heart is beating rapidly against his chest, and how his palms are sweating. Why is he so nervous? He has no idea, but he is.

"Excuse me?" The stranger looks up from his phone, and Richie can swear his cheeks look rosier than a moment ago. "I uh... I dropped my pen and it's right next to your feet."

He looks down, raising his eyebrows ever-so-slightly while doing so. *Cute* , Richie can't help but think. "Here you go," he says timidly, handing him the pen with a tight, yet soft, smile.

“Thank you,” it’s all Richie is able to say, carefully taking the pen so he doesn’t end up touching the stranger’s skin. He can feel the opportunity leaving as soon as he arrived, and he’ll be damned if he lets it slip away. “Do you mind if I sit here? I’m about to punch that kid behind me.”

By the time he asks his question, the stranger was already focusing back on his phone, but the implication of a grown man punching a kid makes him snap his head back up, a wildy amused look painted over his face.

“Sure, go ahead.” He clears his throat and sits up a bit straighter, if possible, Richie can see him fidgeting with his hands as he figures out what the hell to do with his phone.

Once he’s sitting across from him, they’re making eye contact once more. Being closer Richie can see his eyes are actually a lighter color than he thought, they’re also round and big, like a puppy. They make Richie’s stomach flutter, something he’s convinced he hasn’t felt in decades.

“I’m Richie, Richie Tozier.”

“I’m Edward... Kaspbrak.” He extends his hand for Richie to shake, and when they do Richie swears he can feel something shaking his entire core, but decides to ignore it.

“Do I know you?” Richie blurts, not giving his brain cells a chance to start working again.

“I... don’t think so?” He replies, frowning at both their questions. This man is too cute for his own good. “Do *I* know you?”

“Well, I’m gonna sound like a huge, conceited, jackass right now, but I thought you’d know who I was when I told you my name.” He nearly cringes at his own words, but he’s somewhat happy Edward seems to have an interest in him, and not *Richie Tozier* the B-list celebrity.

“Why should I?” Edward’s expression is deadpan, Richie somehow finds it hilarious.

"I have a talk show on the radio and am kind of a regular on SNL. I'm used to it I guess." He shrugs.

"That's not conceited." Edward is quick to say, looking down at his hands. "I guess I don't listen to the radio that much, and I find SNL kind of stupid."

Richie whistles, finding himself admiring his honesty. "That's a first."

"What? People usually kiss the floor you walk on?" His demeanor changes so quickly it nearly causes Richie whiplash.

"Just when I'm there, pretty sure they lick it once I'm gone," he jokes, feeling some tension on his shoulders disappear.

"Well now, that is conceited." Richie's mouth falls at this, causing Edward to almost smile.

"Damn, Eds. You really know how to bruise a man's ego."

"Don't call me Ed's." He immediately jumps, not knowing he just gave him the perfect weapon to edge him with.

"Fine, Eddie." His eye twitches, but he doesn't correct him this time. *Eddie it is*, Richie thinks happily. "So, are you from Derry?" He cuts through the silence, his nerves make him feel as though he needs to keep talking.

Eddie's brows shoot back up, *fuck him*. "Uh, yeah. Hadn't been there in ages, though." He presses his lips into a tight line, and frowns as he seems to think about something very important. "Was that you? At the Barrens?"

Richie chuckles, somewhat relieved he wasn't the only one who recognized the other. "Yeah, for the record I wasn't following you. I'm not a creep --"

"That's exactly what a creep would say," the other man quips back, now making Richie look amused.

"Touché." They're smiling at each other now, it feels weird, because

Richie can swear he's starting to feel comfortable around him,  
something that definitely never happens.

---

*I tremble too, where'er my own I find,*

*Some dire misfortune follows close behind.*

## 6. Chapter 6

Trembling hands held the piece of paper with instructions close to his face. He'd probably read them a thousand times by then, he knew what he had to do.

It was quite simple, really.

*"We usually don't do this with such a short notice, Mr. Tozier. But we've decided to make an exception considering your situation."* The doctor said, the generous check Richie wrote them still peeking from his patient file. *"Still, we guarantee the results will be the same as everyone else's. You already got rid of all your stuff."*

He took one last walk around the apartment. The pictures on the walls and shelves of him and Eddie aren't around anymore. The cabinet full of meds next to the fridge was now nearly empty, leaving only his adderall and some pain relievers. His closet was now half empty. He even went as far as throwing away the, *separate*, bottles of shampoo, conditioner and body wash Eddie bought him.

*You can't **actually** believe this 3-on-1 bullshit actually works, right?*

He'd asked as soon as he saw the bottle the first time he showered at Eddie's house. Richie made a joke about how he once used it to wash his precious Cadillac as well, Eddie nearly went into one of his fits until he got he was just kidding.

It was a memory that never failed to make him smile, even though the feeling was now bittersweet.

*"When it's all clear, all you have to do is take the pills we gave you and go to bed. You'll be out in no time and when you wake up the next morning, it'll be like nothing happened."*

Richie stared at the two white pills on his hand, the doctor's words resonating in his mind: *"Like nothing happened"*. He wondered if the doctor had told Eddie the same, and if after he'd felt the same hesitation he felt then.

Eddie had done it anyways, so maybe he didn't.

He clenched his hand and jaw, and took one last deep breath before continuing. "Like nothing happened." Richie muttered as he swallowed the pills without water, and headed straight to bed while trying to keep his mind quiet.

He laid peacefully when the strangest thing happened. One moment he was trying to focus on his respirations, opening his eyes every now and then to look at the hour, and the next one, when he opened them again, the room was different. It vaguely resembled his room, and Eddie's, before he left. But there were a couple of chairs and a coffee table that he *definitely* didn't own.

Richie sat on the bed, confused. Had they take him to another location while he slept? He suddenly began to panic at this thought, wondering if he'd woken up mid procedure.

There was a bright, fluorescent light coming from what should be his living room. Maybe the people working with him were in the other room, he could let them know that he was awake so they could carry on. He most definitely still remembered everything.

Hesitantly, he stood up and walked slow and quiet steps towards the light. For a moment, he swore he could hear Eddie's voice.

"Definitely still remember him," he said quietly, now questioning his choices and all the money he'd decided to spend on them.

*"I don't get what's your problem!"* He heard Eddie yell.

That sounded too real, definitely not like it was inside his head.

*"What do you mean you don't **get it** ? It's the exact same one we've been having since we got together for real!"*

Richie halted, his knees aching and threatening to give out due to the abrupt movement, and the shock. That was his voice, and Eddie's. They were fighting, he'd dreamt of that fight for weeks now.

It was the night they broke up.

He peeked through the door, immediately finding Eddie and himself, standing in front of each other on opposite sides of the living room. That one was somewhat different as well. Larger, and somehow colder.

*"Richie, we've been over this a thousand times."* Eddie said in a somewhat calmer tone.

"That doesn't make it any less shitty."

*"That doesn't make it any less shitty!"* Both him and, what he presumed to be, the memory of him said at the same time.

"Holy fuck," he muttered under his breath, finally venturing into the other room. "I'm inside my head..." Saying it out loud hit different, Richie felt like he would throw up, but he held it down, not really knowing what the rules for inner mind trips were.

*"But you agreed to it. You agreed to be with me regardless of the whole deal with my mother,"* Eddie tried to reason with him, which would normally work but that night was different from the rest. *"You said it didn't matter that she didn't know about us, or even that I'm gay."*

*"Well, turns out it does."* The memory of him said, *"you stand up against her for the stupidest things but you can do it for me? What the fuck, Ed."*

He sat on the couch between them, simply watching the scene in front of him unfold. He knew how it ended, he knew living it once more would hurt. But a part of him felt like he needed it, he needed to remember why he was doing this, why he needed to let go of Eddie.

Eddie was silent, arms crossed over his chest, his lips and jaw tight, brown eyes unfocused and lost somewhere in the room that wasn't near Richie.

*"You're not gonna say anything? Really? Of all the times I've wanted you to shut up this isn't one of them."* Richie wanted to shut up himself, but he couldn't. The small black box in the inner pocket of his jacket burning, to the point he could swear he felt the gold band burning his

skin.

*"What do you want me to say? There's literally nothing I could do-"*

*"Oh fuck you . You know damn well there is **something** you could do, you just don't want to."* He swore his own words hurt him more than they hurt Eddie. *"Just admit already that you don't care about this-about me ."*

Eddie's whiskey eyes snapped back to him, and he took one deep breath in before finally breaking: *"perhaps it'd be easier to do so if you weren't so disgusting and unbearable!"*

The expression and mess of emotions within Richie were indescribable. They'd fought many times before, yes, but never like that. Looking at it from a different perspective certainly did something to Richie, if he knew then what he did know he would've done many things differently.

But he didn't.

*"Oh, you're the one to fucking talk, Mr. Fanny Pack."*

*"Listen to you! You've always been like this: an immature asshole."*

*"Asshole, nice one. How long did you have to think of that?"*

*"Certainly more than you when writing your moronic jokes."*

Richie chuckled, but not the memory of him. "You always knew how to bruise a man's ego, Eds."

"Don't call me Ed's." He nearly jumped in his seat, definitely startled by the fact *memory* Eddie acknowledged him for a second. It looked straight at him, making him giddy, almost nervous, while *memory* Richie kept yelling.

*"- your fucking disgusting habits, and shitty hipster music. You're middle aged, Richard. Grow the fuck up."* It was almost unnatural how it went back to its role as painful memory in less than a second. Then again nothing about his current situation was natural.

*"At least I'm not a miserable, repressed, hypochondriac."*

And with that, Eddie shut up.

The seconds that followed weren't many, but they felt eternal then, and they kept feeling that way as he witnessed the scene once more.

One more time, he watched a cocktail of emotions paint over Eddie's expression. Then how he turned around, packed his red duffel bag in a couple of minutes, while Richie poured himself a drink, and walked past him, straight to the front door.

*"Where are you going?"* He slurred, nearly choking on his drink.

*"We're done here, I can't do this anymore."* Eddie replied, already on the other side of the door while removing the apartment's key off his set.

*"You can't do this anymore?"* Richie asked incredulously, standing inside.

*"Yes, I can't. Get yourself someone 'out and proud', that's willing to put up with your shitstain of a life, Richie. Heaven knows I've wasted enough of mine. Leave me alone, don't try to call me. It's over."*

And with that, he closed the door behind him, not without throwing the small silver key at Richie before leaving.

He watched himself for a long while, staring at the closed door and trying to process what had just happened. He didn't get it then, and he didn't get it now. Richie tried to make peace with the fact that he never would, once his memories where gone.

*"FUCK!"* He yelled, throwing the whiskey glass towards the other side of the room, the ring box right after.

The shards of glass disappeared as soon as they hit the floor, and so did the clone of him. Everything else in the room began fading away too, and he closed his eyes as he allowed the procedure to do what it promised.

*"Like nothing happened."*

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*Tears still are mine, and those I need not spare,  
Love but demands what else were shed in pray'r;  
No happier task these faded eyes pursue;  
To read and weep is all they now can do.*